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The Transportation System in Brief

Nearly 7 million people call the San Francisco Bay Area home, but they are hardly a stay-at-home group. To get to work, school, shopping or other activities, the region's residents made more than 21 million trips on an average weekday in 2002, about 17 percent more than in 1990. Most of these trips are made by car (84 percent), with walking and bicycling being the next most common mode (10 percent), followed by public transit with 6 percent of trips. Over the course of a year, over 500 million transit trips are taken, and close to 30 billion miles are logged on the region's freeways (see table below).

Taking a closer look at the data in the table below, we can see that Bay Area population has grown in each of the last five years, though at a slower rate in 2002 than in prior years. However, employment has fallen back since peaking in 2000. Between 2000 and 2002, the region lost over 200,000 jobs in the bursting of the high-tech bubble. Reflecting, in part, the drop in employment, the number of transit trips decreased by 3 percent in fiscal year 2001-02, after peaking at 533 million trips the year before. Still, transit ridership recorded a 9 percent overall increase from fiscal year 1997-98 to 2001-02.

Going forward, projections indicate that population will continue to increase in the Bay Area, driven by revived job growth. By 2025, the region's population is expected to grow to 8.2 million people and employment will expand to nearly 5 million jobs. More people means more travel and increased pressures on regional and local transportation systems. Maintaining mobility will require wise investment of always-limited resources. MTC and the region will wrestle with how best to accomplish this in the coming year, as the long-range transportation plan for the region, dubbed Transportation 2030, is developed with the aid of transportation partners and public input.

The Freeway System

The Bay Area's 620-mile freeway system is the workhorse of the transportation network. In 2002, vehicles traveled more than 29 billion miles on Bay Area freeways — about 60 percent of all miles driven by trucks and passenger vehicles in the region. The roving tow trucks of the Freeway Service Patrol cruise along some 450 miles of the most congested freeways and expressways, helping motorists with car trouble, removing debris or quickly clearing accidents.

Population, Employment and Travel in the Bay Area, 1998–2002

	In Thousands					Percent Change	
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2001–2002	1998–2002
Residents	6,614	6,703	6,818	6,917	6,956	+1%	+5%
Jobs	3,298	3,388	3,541	3,506	3,334	–5%	+1%
Vehicle Miles Driven on Freeways	27,074,800	27,657,600	28,654,600	28,996,200	29,190,800	+1%	+8%
Transit Trips	474,200	481,985	506,107	533,038	514,958	–3%	+9%

Sources: California Employment Development Department, California Department of Finance, Caltrans, Metropolitan Transportation Commission

Transit trips data is compiled by fiscal year, e.g., data listed for 1998 represents July 1, 1997–June 30, 1998.

Closer Look at Commuting – Commuting to work accounts for roughly a quarter of all Bay Area trips. According to data from the 2000 Census, the average commute in 2000 was 29.4 minutes, an increase of nearly 15 percent from 1990. As with all trips, most commute trips are by private vehicle; 68 percent of work trips are by people driving alone and 13 percent by people in carpools and vanpools; 10 percent take transit and 3 percent walk. The Census reports that 4 percent of workers work at home and do not commute.

Every year since 1992, RIDES for Bay Area Commuters, Inc. has conducted a survey of its own to understand Bay Area commuting patterns and promote ridesharing. While not as comprehensive as the Census, the RIDES survey helps to provide insight into why people make the choices they do and how they feel their commutes have changed.

In 2002, RIDES asked solo commuters why they drove to work alone. The most popular responses were: no one to carpool with (22 percent); work hours or schedule (18 percent); no practical transit options (14 percent); and need for vehicle during work (11 percent). In surveying transit commuters, RIDES found the most common reasons people gave for taking transit were: don't own a car (19 percent); comfort/relaxation (17 percent); parking unavailability or cost (13 percent); commuting cost (13 percent); and travel time (12 percent).

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The freeway system includes 298 miles of “diamond lanes” that allow people in carpools, vanpools and buses to bypass congestion during peak commute hours. In 2002, carpool lanes carried 15 percent of the vehicles and 28 percent of the people in the peak commute hour on freeway segments with carpool lanes.

The Local Roadway Network

Bay Area cities and counties maintain more than 19,000 centerline miles of local roadways, which must balance the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians as well as those traveling by buses and private automobiles. About half of the traffic signals on the region's local roadway system are timed to reduce the amount of time people spend waiting at red lights. In some major bus corridors, signals are programmed to give preferential treatment to buses that are running late so they can get back on schedule.

The Public Transit System

In fiscal year 2001-02, Bay Area transit operators provided 188 million vehicle miles of service and carried 515 million passengers. Buses provide nearly half of all service miles and carry two-thirds of all passengers. BART, commuter rail, light rail, ferries, and door-to-door vans and taxis that serve elderly and disabled riders (called paratransit service) carry the remaining third. The region's operators have long been recognized as leaders in making the transit system accessible to persons with disabilities. Today, more than 90 percent of the region's buses and 94 percent of transit centers and rail stations are accessible to persons using wheelchairs.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

The ability to get around safely on foot or by bicycle is increasingly recognized as an essential factor in a neighborhood's quality of life. Also, there is a growing recognition that walking and cycling can help to promote healthier lifestyles and combat health conditions associated with

decreasing levels of physical activity, such as obesity and diabetes.

The network used by bicyclists and pedestrians is ubiquitous. It includes the entire local roadway system, as well as sidewalks and some dedicated pathways. In addition, most buses and trains now accommodate bicycles. Bicycles and pedestrians are excluded from freeways for safety purposes, but access is provided on Bay Area bridges, either through bicycle lanes, special vans or transit service connections. Still, there are numerous locations without sidewalks or bicycle lanes; in such cases, bicyclists and pedestrians must share a lane with traffic. The safety of pedestrians and cyclists is a topic of increasing concern, and programs such as Safe Routes to School and other safety initiatives are being deployed by jurisdictions around the region.

The *2001 Regional Transportation Plan* proposed a 1,900-mile network of regionally significant bicycle facilities; the plan also identified gaps in city- and county-level bicycle plans and recommended specific improvements to fill these gaps. Approximately 35 percent of the regional network exists today. Regionwide, bicycling accounts for 1 percent of all trips, and walking accounts for about 9 percent. However, for trips to school, bicycling accounts for about 4 percent of trips and walking for more than 20 percent.

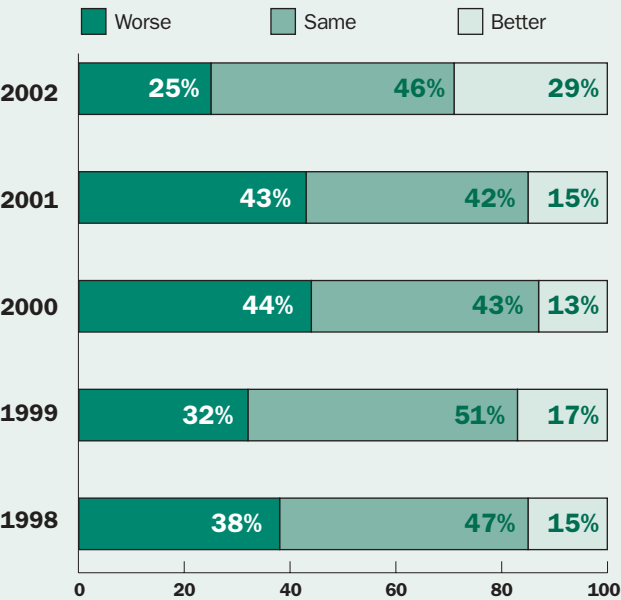
Airports and Seaports

The region's airports and seaports are gateways to the rest of the country and the world for tourism, business travel and trade. Most residents are familiar with the major international airports in San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose. Less well known are the region's five major seaports and their cargo specialties: Oakland (container cargo); San Francisco and Redwood City (construction materials); Benicia (automobiles and petroleum coke); and Richmond (gasoline and oil). Handling over 54 million passengers and 1.7 million containers a year, the Bay Area's airports and seaports also generate considerable ground traffic in surrounding areas.

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As shown below, the RIDES survey also showed that people viewed their commute more favorably last year than in the years just prior. In 2002, 29 percent of those surveyed felt their commute had improved, while only 25 percent felt the opposite. In 2001, only 15 percent felt better about their commute, and 43 percent reported that it had gotten worse.

Percent of Commuters Who Claim Their Commute Is Better or Worse Than Last Year



Source: RIDES for Bay Area Commuters, Inc.